

California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

K-12 Public Education Work Group

Background

San Joaquin Valley students make up roughly 13% of the state's six million public school children. Over half of student enrollment is concentrated in 8% of the region's 228 school districts. The eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley (Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare) are among the state's fastest growing regions and children make-up a high proportion of the overall population. There are 46 children under 16 years old for every 100 people of working age in the region, compared to the state average of 38. The high concentration of children in the area underscores the importance of K-12 public schools to the region and yet most indicators show student achievement in the San Joaquin Valley lagging behind the Central Valley as a whole and the rest of the state.

A school's score on the Academic Performance Index (API) is an indicator of a school's level of performance. Nearly one third of students in the San Joaquin Valley (235,218 children) attend schools that rank in the bottom 20% of the API (See Appendix A). Indeed, with few exceptions, student achievement in the San Joaquin Valley is lower than state averages as measured by the California Standards Tests (CST), the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), and schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

The eight-county average for passing the English language arts section of the CAHSEE was 69% in 2004, compared to the state average of 75%. For the math section, San Joaquin Valley counties averaged a 68% pass rate compared with the state average of 74%. San Joaquin Valley counties also have lower percentages of children testing proficient or advanced across all grade levels in English language arts and math than those of the state as a whole. These low test scores have caused many schools in the region to miss proficiency targets and thus, fail to meet federal AYP. Of the 228 school districts in the Valley, only 105 (46%) made AYP in 2003-04. On a micro level, of the 1,238 schools in the region, a mere 684 (55%) made AYP in the same year. It is worth noting the Valley has a significant English learner (EL) population at 25.6%. That average, however, is only slightly higher than the state's average of 25.1%. Yet, San Joaquin Valley schools tend to have lower percentages of EL students re-designated to Fluent English Proficient (FEP) than the state average, which is currently 8.9%.

The situation in the region's high schools provides a particularly striking example of the challenges the area faces. The San Joaquin Valley has lower percentages of students completing college preparatory courses and taking college entrance exams than the rest of

the state. The following three indicators of college readiness show Valley students at a disadvantage. First, only 26% of high school students in the San Joaquin Valley, compared to 34% statewide, completed the course sequence for UC and CSU eligibility. Second, students are less likely to take the SAT: 23% region wide compares poorly to 37% statewide. Lastly, access to counseling on high school campuses is limited. Statewide, there are 874 K-12 students per counselor. In the San Joaquin Valley the ratio is 975. Five of the eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley have pupil/counselor ratios greater than 1,000, especially Madera, Tulare and Merced counties where there are more than 1,200 students per counselor.

The status of the San Joaquin Valley's high schools impacts students' access to the University of California, including UC Merced the first new UC campus to open in forty years. General statistics bear out that the San Joaquin Valley has a low share of UC-bound graduates when compared to other Central Valley regions and the rest of the state. Yet, as campus officials at UC Merced welcome their first class of 1,000 freshmen, transfer and graduate students, there is reason for measured optimism. Central Valley students (ranging from Placer county in the north to Kern county in the south) will represent almost 30% of the school's freshmen.

It is also true, however, that the largest numbers of freshman are coming from California's major population centers, including Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. University officials are working hard to fight against the trend. UC Merced and PG&E Corporation have teamed up to enhance outreach to San Joaquin Valley residents and draw students to the new campus. In another example, university officials are weighing sponsorship of charter schools as a way to build-up the numbers of college eligible high school graduates. UC Merced would not be alone in adopting the approach. Other Valley universities including CSU Fresno, CSU Stanislaus and University of the Pacific have opened charter schools or are in the planning stages.

Another prominent issue for San Joaquin Valley schools is vocational education. The Governor's Administration and the California Center for Regional Leadership have both advocated for the expansion of quality vocational education programs in the Valley. While it is important to provide every child the opportunity to go to college, it is also essential to provide career skills for those who wish to work in specific trades that require a technical education. The Valley is home to 11 Regional Occupation Programs (ROP), each responsible for administering a number of vocational education opportunities through local school districts and community colleges.

Overall achievement data points to areas of focus for San Joaquin Valley students. Still, there are many unanswered questions about the health of school systems in the area that cannot be discerned by looking at student achievement data alone. Are school districts fiscally solvent? Are school facilities sufficient to meet the demands of a growing school-age population? Are students entering K-12 public schools ready to learn? Are instructional materials and professional development for teachers and principals sufficiently focused and available to produce the desired results with children? What best practices can be drawn from schools and districts in the region?

The K-12 education work group will give education leaders and community partners an opportunity to explore these and other themes through a meaningful dialogue that promises to heighten the awareness of state policy makers on the particular condition of K-12 education in the San Joaquin Valley and provide thoughtful recommendations for action.

Goal:

The goal of the K-12 public education work group is to:

- Engage the eight county superintendents of education around a set of state strategies to help improve low performing schools.
- Provide a forum for the Secretary of Education to dialogue with education leaders around locally conceived policy priorities and solutions to the challenges facing K-12 public schools in the San Joaquin Valley.
- Explore new models for family-based, school-linked services that could be applied in the Valley.

Existing Resources and Publications

Several groups have conducted research on educational outcomes in the Central Valley in recent years. The Public Policy Institute of California completed a two-report series commissioned by The James Irvine Foundation. *Student and School Indicators for Youth in California's Central Valley* authored by Anne Dannenbert, Christopher Jepsen, and Pedro Cerdan was published in 2002. A companion report was published in 2004 entitled, *The Central Valley at a Crossroads: Migration and Its Implications* by Hans P. Johnson and Joseph M. Hayes.

Also in 2004, the Great Valley Center published the fifth installment of *The State of the Great Central Valley* series examining the state of education in the region. *State of the Great Central Valley—Education and Youth Preparedness* was authored by Nancy Goodban, John Hedderson, Mary Jo Ortiz and Lisa Branton and sponsored by Paramount Agricultural Companies, Kaiser Permanente, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and The James Irvine Foundation.

In 2001, The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning launched a significant effort with education leaders in Kern County to apply regional solutions to teacher shortage issues based on research by Stanford Research Institute (SRI) International. The local project in Kern County has its roots in a multi-year initiative funded by The James Irvine Foundation and the Stuart Foundation called "Teaching and California's Future." A project of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, the initiative was publicly launched in 1999 with the release of a report entitled *The Status of the Teaching Profession: Research Findings and Policy Recommendations* by SRI International. The

report provided a stark picture of the shortage and maldistribution of fully prepared teachers across the state, and pointed out the regional dynamic of supply and demand.

The California Department of Education provides the most current data and statistics collected from California schools to identify trends, educational needs and to measure performance. These reports are available through an online resource on the department's website. It provides statewide information and data by county, school district and school site on test scores, enrollment, graduates, dropouts, course enrollments, staffing, and data regarding English learners.

Other online resources that frame California Department of Education data in interesting ways include both Just for the Kids and Great Schools. Among other things, Just for the Kids provides side-by-side comparisons of California public schools with the same student demographics but radically different outcomes in achieving student proficiency on California Standards Tests. The website is sponsored by California Business for Education Excellence. Sponsored by Washington Mutual Bank, Great Schools provides information about public, private and charter schools in all 50 states and detailed profiles for ten states, including California.

San Joaquin Valley Focus

The focus of the K-12 public education work group will be to actively engage education stakeholders in the San Joaquin Valley in state-level discussions around school accountability and interventions for low performing schools. In addition, the work group will serve as a conduit to facilitate regular communication and access for local education leaders with the Secretary of Education as the Administration considers policy and budget priorities for K-12 education.

Work Plan

- Establish a high level work group of the eight county superintendents of education for Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare for the purpose of engaging around a set of state strategies to improve low performing schools.
- Provide updated achievement data for the region based on newly released test results on California Standards Tests and school rankings on the Academic Performance Index and Adequate Yearly Progress.
- Facilitate a series of round-table discussions with local education leaders and the Secretary for Education to encourage a dialogue about locally conceived policy priorities and solutions to the challenges facing K-12 public schools in the San Joaquin Valley.